

MEMORANDUM

February 9, 2021

To: The Honorable Ro Khanna
Attention: Kate Gould

From: Jill H. Wilson, Analyst in Immigration Policy, jwilson@crs.loc.gov, 7-0002
Holly Straut-Eppsteiner, Analyst in Immigration Policy, hstrauteppsteiner@crs.loc.gov, 7-9178
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Subject: **The Foreign-born and Second-generation Population and their Origins of Birth, 1900–2020**

This memorandum responds to your request for data on the number and origins of the foreign-born and “second-generation” populations in the United States from 1900 to the present. Specifically, you asked what share of the U.S. population is comprised of the foreign born and their U.S.-born children and what share of this population is of European origin. As discussed, this memorandum provides the requested data based on two different methods of measuring the second generation. Both methods are described before presenting the results. CRS may receive similar requests on this topic from other Members of Congress. While CRS has tailored the discussion below to your specific request, CRS may use portions of it in other products.

Definitions and Methodological Options

The U.S. Census Bureau produces data on the foreign-born population living in the United States. The Bureau classifies as *foreign born* anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth. The foreign-born population includes naturalized citizens, non-citizen U.S. nationals,¹ lawful permanent residents, nonimmigrants (e.g., students, temporary workers), refugees, asylees, and unauthorized migrants.² The *native-born* population is made up of individuals born in the United States, Puerto Rico, the U.S. island areas of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and those born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents.

U.S.-born children with at least one foreign-born parent are often referred to as *the second generation*. The U.S. Census Bureau has collected data on this population in different ways over the years. From 1900 through 1970, the decennial census asked where the respondent’s mother and father were born, allowing data users to *directly* measure the second generation: counting native-born individuals with at least one

¹ A U.S. national is a person owing permanent allegiance to the United States and includes citizens. Noncitizen nationals are individuals who were born either in American Samoa or on Swains Island to parents who were not citizens of the United States.

² For more information on these foreign-born categories, see CRS Report R45020, *A Primer on U.S. Immigration Policy*.

foreign-born parent. Beginning in 1980, however, decennial census questionnaires (and, subsequently, the annual American Community Survey (ACS), which replaced the long form of the decennial census³) have not included questions on parental place of birth. Thus, researchers using these datasets for 1980 on use an *indirect* method of isolating the second-generation population: counting native-born individuals who are living with at least one foreign-born parent. This method undercounts the second generation because it does not include individuals born to one or two foreign-born parents who are no longer living with their parent(s). A second source of data from which to estimate the second-generation population is the Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted monthly by the U.S. Census Bureau in conjunction with the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Since 1994, the CPS has included questions on parental place of birth in its Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), allowing data users to directly measure the second generation from 1994 to the present.

Neither of these approaches allow for direct measurement of the second generation over the entire period of interest (1900 to present, by decade). Thus, this memorandum applies two methods for estimating the second-generation population: an *indirect* method (covering the entire period of interest) and a *direct* method (which leaves a gap in time coverage). As mentioned above, because the decennial census/ACS fails to allow for direct measurement after 1970, an indirect measure is used in order to produce comparable statistics for the entire period.⁴ This method counts as second-generation individuals (regardless of age) who are native born and living with one or two foreign-born parent(s). The results from this method are presented below in “Results: Indirect Measure.” The decennial census/CPS method allows for *direct* measurement for 1900–1970 and 2000–2020, but leaves a gap in coverage for 1980 and 1990. The results from this method are presented below in “Results: Direct Measure.”⁵

You requested that CRS categorize the foreign-born and second-generation populations into two broad categories based on origins: “European” and “non-European.” As you requested, CRS included anyone born in (or, in the case of the second generation, the child of someone born in) Europe, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand as “European,” and those born elsewhere (or, in the case of the second generation, the child of someone born elsewhere) as “non-European.”⁶

Results: Indirect Measure

Table 1 presents data on the foreign-born and second generation population using the indirect method of measuring the second-generation population. This method uses data from the decennial census for the years 1900 through 2000 and ACS data for 2010 and 2019.

³ For more information on the implementation of the ACS and its replacement of the long form, see CRS Report R41532, *The American Community Survey: Development, Implementation, and Issues for Congress*.

⁴ Results from this method are reported for each decade from 1900 through 2010 and for 2019 (since the U.S. Census Bureau has not yet released ACS data for 2020).

⁵ For both methods, CRS used microdata files provided by IPUMS USA. Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 10.0. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V10.0>.

⁶ In 2019, the 925,176 foreign-born individuals from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand comprised 2% of the total 44,932,799 foreign-born individuals living in the United States (CRS computation using 2019 American Community Survey Table B05006.) It is not uncommon for researchers examining the origins of the foreign born and second generation to categorize individuals born in Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand together. See, for example, Urban Institute, *Part of Us: A Data-Driven Look at Children of Immigrants*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.urban.org/features/part-us-data-driven-look-children-immigrants>. Children who have one parent born in Europe/Canada/Australia/New Zealand and one born in another world region could be categorized as either “European” or “non-European.” As you requested, CRS categorized such children as “non-European.” In most decades, such children made up a fraction of one percent of the second-generation population; at most, they made up 1.3%.

**Table 1. Foreign-born and Second-generation Population Shares and Origins:
Indirect Method**

Based on residence with at least one foreign-born parent, 1900-2019

Year	Percent of U.S. population that is foreign born or second generation	Percent of foreign-born and second- generation population that is "European"
1900 ^a	26.6%	98.0%
1910 ^b	27.0%	96.6%
1920	25.7%	94.8%
1930	22.5%	92.4%
1940	16.9%	92.7%
1950	12.2%	84.1%
1960 ^c	8.9%	77.2%
1970	7.2%	67.2%
1980	8.9%	43.2%
1990	11.2%	26.2%
2000	15.6%	18.0%
2010	19.1%	13.5%
2019	20.6%	12.0%

Source: 1900–2000: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses; 2010 and 2019: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. Both data sources analyzed using microdata accessed via IPUMS (see footnote 5).

Notes: The foreign-born population is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as all individuals living in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. The second-generation population is defined as the native-born population (regardless of age) living with at least one foreign-born parent. As you requested, “European” is defined as anyone born in (or, in the case of the second-generation population, the child of parents born in) Europe, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand.

- a. In 1900, people born abroad to U.S. citizens are counted as foreign born because the citizen question was only asked of men age 21 and older who were not U.S. citizens at birth. For 1900, the native- and foreign-born populations are instead identified using place of birth. This results in an overestimate of the total foreign-born population share of 13.7% compared to the 13.6% estimate provided by the U.S. Census Bureau report: Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000, U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, Working Paper No. 81, February 2006, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2006/demo/POP-twps0081.pdf>.
- b. In 1910, people born abroad to U.S. citizens are counted as foreign born because the citizen question was only asked of men age 21 and older who were not U.S. citizens at birth. For 1910, the native- and foreign-born populations are instead identified using place of birth. This results in an overestimate of the total foreign-born population share of 14.8% compared to the 14.7% estimate provided by the U.S. Census Bureau report: Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000, U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, Working Paper No. 81, February 2006, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2006/demo/POP-twps0081.pdf>.
- c. In 1960, people born abroad to U.S. citizens are counted as foreign born because the citizen question was not included on the census questionnaire. The native- and foreign-born populations are instead identified using place of birth. This results in an overestimate of the total foreign-born population share of 5.7% compared to the 5.4% estimate provided by the U.S. Census Bureau report: Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000, U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, Working Paper No. 81, February 2006, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2006/demo/POP-twps0081.pdf>.

Results: Direct Measure

Table 2 presents data on the foreign-born and second generation population using the direct method of measuring the second-generation population. This method uses data from the decennial census for the years 1900 through 1970 and CPS data for 2000 through 2020.

**Table 2. Foreign-born and Second-generation Population Shares and Origins:
Direct Method
1900-1970, 2000-2020**

Year	Percent of U.S. population that is foreign born or second generation	Percent of foreign-born and second-generation population that is "European"
1900 ^a	34.7%	98.1%
1910 ^b	35.8%	97.2%
1920	35.2%	95.9%
1930	33.2%	94.0%
1940	26.6%	94.5%
1950	22.8%	90.3%
1960 ^c	19.3%	87.6%
1970	16.2%	79.7%
2000	20.4%	30.0%
2010	24.0%	20.8%
2020	26.4%	15.5%

Source: 1900–1970: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses; 2000–2020: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey. Both data sources analyzed by CRS using microdata accessed via IPUMS (see footnote 5).

Notes: The foreign-born population is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as all individuals living in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. The second-generation population is defined as all individuals living in the United States who were native born and had at least one foreign-born parent. As you requested, “European” is defined as anyone born in (or, in the case of the second-generation population, the child of parents born in) Europe, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand.

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